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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 001563

SIPDIS

WHA/CCA FOR JHILLSMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2019
TAGS: [CU](#) [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: BELGIUM: REVIEW FOR SUSPENSION OF TITLE III OF THE
LIBERTAD ACT

REF: SECSTATE 115416

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor Robert Kiene for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Belgium follows the EU common position regarding promotion of human rights and democracy in Cuba. GOB has not made any recent public statements nor governmental actions condemning human rights abuses in Cuba. Belgian EU Commissioner for Development De Gucht has an on-going relationship with senior officials and held a two-hour meeting with Raul Castro this month. Belgium does not have any significant business connections nor exchange programs with Cuba. Belgium would welcome a continued suspension of the Libertad Act, yet it is still waiting for concrete results from the recent improvement in the EU-Cuban relationship. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In response to the reftel request Poloff and Polintern met with Sadi Brancart, Belgian MFA Desk Officer on November 17, 2009. Brancart said that Cuba is relatively important to Belgium within Latin America, as evidenced by a Belgium Embassy in Havana focused solely on Cuba. He explained that typically in Latin America, Belgium has one Embassy covering a number of neighboring countries in the region.

Detailed Responses to Questions

¶3. (C) When asked if Belgium has worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba, Brancart said that Belgium has always followed the EU position. He said that in 1996, the EU Common Position toward Cuba was developed to encourage improvement in human rights standards, support for a transition to market economy, and improvement of the standards of the Cuban people by economic engagement. Brancart said that the Cuba sanctions were lifted in June 2008 because the EU saw progress in Cuba's human rights standards. Brancart said that the EU has an on-going formally established dialogue with Cuba.

¶4. (C) The Belgian MFA has not issued any statements condemning human rights or supporting civil society on record for at least five years. Brancart said that there have been no resolutions in Parliament either.

¶5. (C) The sanctions on Cuba enforced in 2003 stated that no high level visits were allowed. However, since June 2008 with the abolition of the sanctions, the EU and GOB have resumed visits at high level and there have been several in the last six months. Brancart said that in May 2009 the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Rodriguez visited the Belgian MFA. Brancart said that the Belgian EU Commissioner for Development & Humanitarian Aid, Karel De Gucht held official talks with Cuba FM Rodriguez in Cuba on November 2, ¶2009. In addition, Brancart said that De Gucht had a two-hour conversation with Raul Castro. Brancart said that

the Cuba FM Rodriguez is expected to meet with another EU Commissioner in Brussels on November 28, 2009. He said that the relationship between the EU and Belgium has improved, but so far Cuba has not changed any positions on human rights or democracy.

16. (C) Brancart stated that it is a Belgian priority to have good relations with Cuba because it has positive regional impact. Brancart stated that trade is not the reason for Belgium's interest in Cuba. Brancart said that Belgium does not have business ties in Cuba, but that due to the size and economy of Cuba, Belgium does not have significant investments in Cuba. Brancart said that the investments Belgium has in Cuba are more oriented toward development projects. Brancart said that there were no bilateral agreements or other cooperative agreements between Belgium and Cuba.

17. (C) Brancart said that there are no scholarship or exchange programs between Belgium and Cuba. He said that Belgium gives development assistance to Cuba. In 2008, this assistance amounted to 4.1 million euros, nearly double the 2007 amount and 0.25 percent of Belgium's global assistance budget. About half of the assistance goes toward education and health programs. Most of the assistance is distributed by cooperating non-governmental organizations. Brancart said that the EU and Belgium are for the continued suspension of the Title III of the Libertad act. Brancart said that the United States and Belgium have different perspectives on Cuba given their stance on Free Trade. Brancart said that Belgium and the EU do seek to promote human rights and democracy in their talks with Cuban officials.

GUTMAN